World Chronicle

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THE MILLENNIUM SUMMIT

Reducing poverty, protection of the environment, promotion of democracy, strengthening respect for human rights and reversing the spread of AIDS. These were the commitments made by world leaders at the United Nations' Millennium Summit. But how can these commitments be implemented? In this edition of **World Chronicle**, Shashi Tharoor, Director of Communications and Special Projects in the Office of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, discusses the outcome of the largest-ever gathering of world leaders – The Millennium Summit.

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ANNOUNCER: From United Nations Headquarters in New York, this is **World Chronicle**, an unedited interview programme about major global issues.

Here now to introduce our guest is the host of today's **World Chronicle**.

LITTLEJOHNS: I'm Michael Littlejohns, and this is **World Chronicle**.

For three days in September 2000, the world came together at United Nations Headquarters in New York. The Millennium Summit. A historic opportunity to address humankind's gravest problems. The largest gathering of world leaders ever, the Summit articulated a vision for a new century. It also stressed the vital role the United Nations must play in helping fulfill the aspirations of people everywhere. But where do we go from here? How can we make sure that the commitments made by the world leaders can and will be put into practice?

Our guest today is Shashi Tharoor, Director of Communications and Special Projects in the Office of the Secretary-General of the United Nations. Joining me to talk with Mr. Tharoor is Afsane Bassir Pour of *Le Monde* and Ian Williams of *The Nation*.

Mr. Tharoor, welcome to **World Chronicle.**

THAROOR: Thank you Michael. Good to be here.

LITTLEJOHNS: Three days in September. Sounds like the title of a movie or a novel. I personally think that it was quite -- I would almost say brilliant success but then nobody cares about my opinion. What do you think it was?

THAROOR: Oh, we think it was a success too. Of course, it didn't feel just like three days in September, it felt like an eternity in many ways. The preparations for it, the anxieties around it. I mean everyone expected that Murphy's Law would apply and that whatever could go wrong would go wrong with 150 presidential motorcades, with the sheer logistics of getting people around, with the round table meetings, all these different innovations, and touch wood it all worked out. Nothing went wrong. In fact, heads of state seemed to find the experience absolutely positive. The round tables, which were a risk in some ways because we'd never invited heads of state or government to sit around a table and talk to each other frankly without scripts before, worked and we've had tremendous feedback from all of them. And as far as the actual Summit itself the conclusions of the Summit, I think, were better than most could have hoped for. We had a genuine reaffirmation of the United Nations and what the institution stands for in the world which we've all come away with, I think, feeling much more energized and feeling that the institution has been given a new sense of direction and purpose in the 21st century.

LITTLEJOHNS: Now what are you guys going to do for an encore?

THAROOR: I think an encore you'll have to wait another millennium as far as the present team is concerned. But what we'd like to do is not so much worry about encores but actually implementing and going ahead with the concrete decisions taken during the Summit.

LITTLEJOHNS: And how are you going to bring that about?

THAROOR: Well, you know, one thing that was striking was that we had for the first time – well, there were a number of things for the first time, but one particular thing for the first time was the reaffirmation of what the UN stands for, the reaffirmation of values which the Secretary-General had called for in the Millennium Declaration. That is something we're going to now really thump the table with in the years to come. There's the specific targets that for the first time heads of state have collectively affirmed; targets ranging from halving extreme poverty by 2015, to getting more children into school, to reducing slums, to tackling HIV/AIDS. Those are activities which of course there are UN agencies that will seek to implement these targets but to which governments will be held accountable. We will go to governments and say, "Where are those resources for this pledge that your head of state signed on to?" That's going to be very important.

LITTLEJOHNS: Fidel Castro called the UN a "worn-out institution" was that a solitary voice in the wilderness?

THAROOR: He didn't say that to the Secretary-General when he met him in one of the many bilateral meetings that the Secretary-General held with visiting heads of state and government. In fact, he affirmed very strongly his faith in the institution and he called for the United Nations to take a leaf out of Cuba's book, in particular in terms of South-South cooperation. He talked about Cuba's work in getting doctors out to other countries of the southern hemisphere and urged that the UN try and work with other southern countries to ensure that this sort of legitimate, essential human need was met through South-South cooperation and we certainly would like to work on that.

BASSIR POUR: Now Shashi, right before the Summit we had other meetings at the summit level. Actually, the non-governmental organizations, thousands of them. And then you opened the doors to the religious leaders, the presidents of parliaments and the private sector. This is what your team – the Secretary-General's team – called the quiet revolution three years ago. It seems to have happened. Now what does this mean, this opening the door to everybody, to the civil society and how was it received by the heads of state?

THAROOR: Again, very positively. Opening the doors is something the Secretary-General has stood for from the day he took over his position. In fact, it was no accident that

the title of the report he submitted to the world leaders, the report for the Millennium Summit, was "We, the Peoples" because he was recording those first three words of the UN Charter, reminding the world that though the world often thinks of the United Nations as "We, the governments" it is in fact an institution established in the name of the peoples of the world and he felt that we have to have a direct connection to the peoples of the world. Of course we work with governments, of course governments provide our resources and give us our policy directions but ultimately what we do affects individual, ordinary human beings. And this is why the Secretary-General has gone out of his way, both in terms of addressing his messages to ordinary people and in terms of allowing representatives of civil society access to the institution in a way that has not quite happened in the same way before. You are right to mention the private sector, the corporations. The Secretary-General has, as you know, called for a global compact between international business and the United Nations under which companies will voluntarily accept principles, which of course governments have already voted for. That is, principles that the United Nations has established in the field of labour, in the field of human rights and in the field of environment and get businesses to sign on to these and work with us, as well for them, of rehabilitating their image with those of their critics in the NGO community and elsewhere who feel they haven't upheld these principles. As far as some of the other groups you mentioned, the NGO's have always been a vital partner of the United Nations. We've always had non-governmental organizations here. They simply had a larger forum and a more expansive agenda to look at the UN in the new millennium. As for the religious leaders, that wasn't a UN meeting as such, but it was a meeting encouraged by the UN. It was organized by a non-governmental group of inter-faith leaders but what it did was by meeting at the United Nations it married the spirit of religion, the spirituality of humankind to the goals, the values and principles of the institution.

BASSIR POUR: Just to go back one second to the private sector. One part of it of course is to hold these multinational companies to some kind of code of conduct, another part, resources. Are we likely to see more Ted Turners participating in UN programmes from other sources? Multinationals maybe?

THAROOR: Well, there's a distinction when we speak of resources between resources for the UN and resources for development. There is no question that resources for development will also have to come from the private sector because right now if you just look at the way in which capital flows around the world are being tracked, whereas just ten years ago official development assistance aid from governments to governments outstripped private sector capital flows by a factor of three or four times to one, today private sector

capital flows to the developing world from the developed are outstripping official development assistance by a factor of six to one. So we clearly feel that the private sector has a vital role to play and that the United Nations must encourage the private sector to go in to developing countries and must encourage developing countries to maintain those standards of governance, a rule of law, essential institutions in their societies that would attract business. So that is one important component. When you speak of Mr. Ted Turner, of course you are speaking of resources for the UN and for UN projects. Now that's something that is a narrower focus. We do welcome contributions. We have certainly a great deal of gratitude to Mr. Turner. Some have joked that he's the man who put the "ted" into United Nations, you know, with the one billion dollar contribution that has to come. But having said that, we at the same time do not see the private sector as a substitute for governments. What the private sector can do is to give us resources in addition to mandated programmes in order to help us to do things we might not otherwise be able to afford to do. That's what Mr. Turner's money is being spent on. But otherwise, we do believe that governments have a solemn treaty obligation to fund this institution, to provide the UN with the resources that are required for the mandates they give us and so we wouldn't want to imply that by turning to the private sector we are in any way prepared to let governments off the hook.

WILLIAMS: Well, that just comes round rather neatly because you were talking before about all of these principles that were reaffirmed and this is the point. These principles were reaffirmed and have regularly been broken by all of these various governments. You know, the Ten Commandments have being getting recited for a couple of thousand years but as far as I know police and divorce lawyers are still very much in business. So having reaffirmed all of these principles doesn't it just mean that they're now going to be broken at a higher level than ever before?

THAROOR: I'd like to think not. Now, obviously, it is easy to be naive and to expect that every particular, every resolution that's passed by governments, is implemented. After all, we at the United Nations are painfully aware that every year the General Assembly votes unanimously to pay all their dues to the UN in full, on time and without conditions and our money very rarely comes in full. It certainly does not come on time and often, especially with some of our major donors, it comes with conditions attached. So I'm not suggesting that every resolution voted is implemented to the letter. What it does however is it sets a benchmark. It sets a standard. It is no longer possible for a government to vote for a human rights convention and then say -- - or to ratify one -- and then to say that human rights don't matter or that they're culturally relative or whatever. The way in which the United Nations

has made a difference in the world in many ways has had to do with the way in which it has established norms for human conduct and governmental conduct and the establishment of those norms can only take place with the active acquiescence of governments. Governments have to vote for resolutions, conventions, treaties, which embody those norms and when those norms are embodied action usually follows. One example that a woman activist was giving me just yesterday was the extraordinary impact of United Nations conferences on women -- and not referring just to Beijing but going back to Mexico City – where some of the agreements arrived at at these conferences established new thresholds which governments were then obliged to take into account in the work they were doing at the national level and the international level. That's the way in which the UN has been able to bring about change in many ways. It's certainly the way in which the environment agenda has moved since Rio. It's certainly the way in which we hope the very principles and values the UN has affirmed at the Millennium Summit will become the lodestar for the conduct of governments in future.

WILLIAMS: If I can throw it in. I think it was six years ago the then Secretary-General made a pledge that 50 percent of all senior posts in the UN will be held by women, has the UN implemented its own pledges in this time?

LITTLEJOHNS: That was Boutrous Ghali.

THAROOR: That was Secretary-General Boutrous Ghali. I must say Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, subscribes very much to the idea behind this and I think he has appointed more senior women than any previous secretary-general. We have a female High Commissioner of Human Rights, for example, which is a very high profile position and a very important one. We have a female Deputy Secretary-General which is in fact the highest position in the UN system after that of the Secretary-General himself. We have women leaders in various other parts of the UN ranging from Personnel here to the World Health Organization. Now that is not a Kofi Annan appointment, nonetheless it's one he's welcomed and supported. I would like to think that these women leaders embody this new attitude of respect for female leadership of the institution. Fifty percent perhaps is not a target that can be met overnight. I would like to tell you though Ian that in some of the entry level functions of the UN we've gone so far in that direction that right now women are a majority at the P-3 level, very close to 50 percent at the P-4 level, and as these women develop their careers in the institution and are promoted I'm quite confident that the 50 percent target will be exceeded at more senior levels as well.

LITTLEJOHNS: P-3 and P-4 being the professional grade.

THAROOR: The professional grades in the civil service. I should have explained

that.

LITTLEJOHNS: Tell me, the coverage that the Millennium Summit received were you satisfied with it? I mean *The New York Times* did pretty much of a blanket job but some of the other media in the United States didn't seem to treat it all that seriously. I suppose elsewhere in the world perhaps it was given due credit but on the whole were you a little disappointed perhaps?

THAROOR: No, on the contrary. I think on the whole I was very positively impressed. In fact, we've had so many clippings flowing in from around the world that I haven't got through all of them yet. And what I've seen so far is widespread and very serious coverage particularly, I'm glad to say, in the developing world. It gladdens the hearts of those of us who are sometimes overexposed to the American media to see serious editorials in Iran for instance about the impact and the importance of this Summit to see articles in the press of Bangladesh, of Fiji about what's going on here at the United Nations. Now, I'm not suggesting that the global media or the media with a global reach doesn't matter. Of course it does. But I'd say we got pretty good coverage there too. There was a lot of coverage every day on CNN for instance that we noticed and saw. You quite correctly pointed out, Michael, that *The New York Times* gave it blanket coverage. Some of the coverage elsewhere may have focused on peripheral issues. We know that President Castro's handkerchief has certainly got reported in even some of the small town newspapers and, of course, the famous handshake to which my answer is frankly that the United Nations is precisely a place where people shake hands. That's what the UN's all about. So yes sometimes you do have trivialities getting reported but on the whole we were satisfied. We believe it reminded the world once again that this is **the** indispensable institution and in today's world, this globalizing world, it's the only really global institution that can manage the various globalizing tendencies -- political, economic and social -- that the world faces today.

LITTLEJOHNS: This is **World Chronicle**. Our guest Shashi Tharoor, Director of Communications and Special Projects in the Office of the Secretary-General of the United Nations.

BASSIR POUR: Speaking about indispensable another thing that's emerged, specially in the Security Council, is that the UN is the instrument for peacekeeping whereas three years ago we were thinking this is the end of peacekeeping. It's picking up but not quite in a very positive way. As Mr. Lakhdar Brahimi, whose report on peacekeeping was at the centre of the meeting always says, it seems that the money comes from the rich and the blood from the poor in peacekeeping. Now, can that change? Can you see this Summit and

this reaffirmation of the importance of peacekeeping making the rich countries put their soldiers into these operations for example?

THAROOR: We'd like to see that happen. We've already said quite openly in the context of Africa and of the two or three operations we are in the processing of either already running or about to mount in Africa, that it is simply not acceptable that the stronger, better equipped, better trained, richer armies in the world should simply leave this to everybody else to do. It is vital that they too should play their part. Now, it's not always easy of course for governments to turn around and extend their soldiers in situations where they may feel they have no stake. We like to argue that the United Nations is precisely the institution where governments have to look beyond a narrowly defined view of their national interest and look rather at the larger picture, look at the common interests of the international community. Sometimes some of the wealthier governments tell us they're overextended right now in places like the Balkans where a number of NATO troops as you know are already committed. We've pointed out to them that nonetheless the problems in Sierra Leone, in Congo, in Ethiopia/Eritrea are also problems just as much important to the United Nations as an institution as the problems in the Balkans once were and we believe that this message has to continually be drummed across. I am telling you quite honestly that we are in the process right now of knocking on a few developed country doors to strengthen our peacekeeping operation in Sierra Leone.

BASSIR POUR: Sierra Leone where the Indians actually are pulling out. What will this mean for Sierra Leone?

THAROOR: Well, we remain committed to Sierra Leone. The United Nations has a mandate from the Security Council and we are determined to fulfill it. It's obviously an incredibly difficult problem, not least because the operation was deployed on the back of a peace agreement which in many ways has unravelled over the course of the last year and a half. But nonetheless that's no good reason to give up. The fact that the challenge is great simply means that the response must also be mounted in a way that's commensurate to that challenge and the Secretary-General remains determined to get governments to come in and fulfill that mandate.

WILLIAMS: There's one we haven't mentioned – well, he has been mentioned but not in the context. One of the undoubted beneficiaries of the success of the Millennium is the Secretary-General who has basked in the admiration of the world. Nobody said a rude word about him. A cynic could say that the not unintended consequence of this is that if he wants a second term he will cruise home to it unopposed next year. Do you have views on

this?

THAROOR: This is an issue that the Secretary-General has of course been asked about in the past. His position has always been, I think you'd all agree, quite correctly that he was elected for one term and he is doing the best he can with the term he has. Now, he has also said that if governments want to consider offering him a second term he will have to think about it. He is not in a position to say today that he will take such a term if offered. It is very much his view that the institution needs committed leadership. He has provided it, in my view and in the view of many observers, and it is then for the Member States to say whether they want to see his brand of leadership continue and then once they say that for him to say whether he feels he's up to putting up with another five years of this punishing schedule. It really is in many ways as the first Secretary-General put it, the most impossible job in the world and it's one that he has fulfilled in ways that I'm certainly pleased that you acknowledge has been widely admired and praised at the Summit and around it. But at this stage we're not speaking about a second term, we're waiting for governments to decide whether they want to offer him one.

WILLIAMS: Well, haven't the governments by sort of implication and applause sort of invited him to stop playing hard to get?

THAROOR: Well, I think you know very well that applause is not necessarily a good indicator of governmental intention.

LITTLEJOHNS: Shashi, the Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, was appointed almost four years ago partly because the Member States – some of the Member States at any rate – were not happy with the way things had been run by Boutros Ghali and particularly because they wanted reforms. How is the reform programme coming along? Has the Secretary-General gone about as far as he can without further mandates from the General Assembly or is there more that can be done?

THAROOR: In fact the phrase "the quiet revolution" that Afsane quoted a little earlier today was a phrase that we, and the Secretary-General, first applied to his reform programme and we believe that the revolution that he could bring about quietly he has already done. These things ranging from something as unnoticeable perhaps as the extraordinarily effective cabinet system which has mixed the United Nations and its disparate funds, programmes and agencies together into a much more seamless coordinated organism to something slightly more visible, the reduction of the length of UN documents, the cuts in staff posts, the reductions in budgetary expenditures and so on. All of those things which are within his authority to fulfill he has fulfilled. Now, there are issues that remain. There are

issues such as, for example, the question of the Security Council reform which is clearly a governmental matter. There is the issue of his recommendation that the General Assembly think in terms of sunset provisions for UN programmes. Again, only governments can decide to do that. So I think it's fair to say that reform is not over. I mean we have notoriously said too often that reform is a process not an event but that what remains to be done in reform is in the court of governments not in that of the Secretary-General.

BASSIR POUR: I wanted to go back to Ian's question about the second term. There is some talk that secretary-generals in general should have one seven-year term to make them more independent. Has this ever been discussed and would it be acceptable by governments specially?

THAROOR: My impression is it's been discussed by journalists and academics but I have not really seen much evidence of it having been discussed by governments and certainly it has not been discussed with the present secretary-general.

BASSIR POUR: Don't you think it would make for a more independent Secretary-General?

THAROOR: Perhaps. It certainly has been said that a secretary-general who didn't have to think about re-election would be more independent. On the other hand I think if you elect a secretary-general with integrity, somebody who believes in what he stands for or she stands for, then re-election should not be the uppermost consideration in their minds when they conduct the functions of their office. I would genuinely assert that Kofi Annan hasn't given re-election a second thought in any of the things he has said or done in his four years in office.

BASSIR POUR: We'll ask Ian about that.

LITTLEJOHNS: But actually there's nothing in writing, I think, that says the Secretary-General should serve for a term – one, two, whatever – of five years.

THAROOR: That's right. The Charter is silent on that subject and in fact it has really been more a question of a convention or of a practice. Indeed, Mr. Trygve Lie didn't serve a full five years and of course we've had the unusual case of Mr. U Thant who actually was Acting Secretary-General for a while after the death of Dag Hammarskjold and then got two terms. So there are various ways of looking at this and ultimately the Member States can make their own rules.

WILLIAMS: I wanted to save the best for last. I mean last year Kofi Annan at the General Assembly sort of made – he got a lot of bristles up by making a strong call for consideration of humanitarian intervention. And as always in UN documents it pays to listen

to the sound of silence and I perused the Millennium documents for any mention whatsoever of this concept. So does this mean that it was sort of killed in committee or is it going to be brandished forth again in a new millennium?

THAROOR: Well no, the concept is there. The Secretary-General put it -- he didn't actually say humanitarian intervention but he spoke of intervention in the broadest sense when human lives and human welfare is at stake and is imperilled. And by intervention he has always intended, though this is not often reported accurately, to cover everything from diplomacy through humanitarian action such as the delivery of aid supplies, to peacekeeping operations, and finally to coercive military intervention. The focus has always been only on the last point whereas in fact he meant the entire panoply of international interventions possible to address human needs. And those issues are up there. They're very much active in the discourse about UN matters. Canada has just appointed an international commission that is going to spend its time trying to flesh out this concept.

WILLIAMS: What's interesting is that Canada appointed the commission not the Secretary-General of the United Nations.

THAROOR: Well, but the Secretary-General of course has no specific mandate to appoint that commission and therefore he will have no budgetary resources to do that. This way the Canadian government will find the money, I believe, with some foundations and will do it themselves. But they are contributing to answering the questions the Secretary-General has raised. The Secretary-General has put certain ideas out to the world. He wants the world to think about them. He has not prescribed answers. He wants the answers to come from others thinking about them and from what governments are prepared to accept and implement. What he wants to do is to make sure that these questions are not forgotten and I assure you the questions are not forgotten, these ideas are very much alive and very many parts of the UN system are right now thinking about how they can effectively intervene to help people, always of course within the limits of the authority given to them by Member States.

LITTLEJOHNS: We have less than a minute left. You spoke about the Religious Summit so to speak. The Secretary-General and the UN generally came into a lot of flak because of the absence of the Dalai Lama. Was there no possibility of getting around that problem so that he could have turned up?

THAROOR: Well, in fact, the leaders who organized the Summit were told that of course they were free to invite whoever they wanted and hold it anywhere they wanted but if they were going to hold it at the United Nations there would have to be certain respect paid

to the sensitivities of Member States. And the fact of the matter is the Dalai Lama -- many of us admire personally and for what he believes spiritually -- is seen by several Member States, and in particular by one, not just as a religious leader but also as a political leader which meant that it would have been impossible to separate out the political dimensions of his work from the religious meeting he was here to attend. And the spiritual leaders seemed to have considered it more important to hold the meeting at the UN and avoid the political pitfalls than to have him come here. He was invited of course to address the meeting at another location.

LITTLEJOHNS: Mr. Tharoor, that's all the time we have. Thank you for being with us on this edition of **World Chronicle**.

Our guest has been Shashi Tharoor, Director of Communications and Special Projects in the Office of the Secretary-General of the United Nations. He was interviewed by Afsane Bassir Pour of *Le Monde* and Ian Williams of *The Nation*.

I'm Michael Littlejohns. Thank you for joining us. We invite you to be with us for the next edition of **World Chronicle.**

ANNOUNCER: Transcripts of the programme may be obtained free of charge by sending a stamped, self-addressed envelope to **World Chronicle**, United Nations, Room S-827L, New York, N.Y., 10017.

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